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The Friday Letter

Vol. 8 No. 17

September 21, 1988

A Message From The Administrator

Regardless of who wins the election in November, there will be a new President in January. I have, therefore, appointed a task force to ease the transition.

The task force will be responsible for preparing a report that will cover the major management issues and challenges facing any new administration, regardless of policy direction. The paper will describe FNS as an organization and what is necessary to keep it functioning efficiently, both to fulfill its mission and to make it a good place to work.

Individual deputy administrators, regional administrators, and other top managers will, of course, be prepared to brief new officials on their own areas of operation, but I feel it would be useful for them to get a global perspective on how it all hangs together. I think the task force report will also serve as a useful self-analysis tool for current agency managers.

The task force members are George Braley, Gene Dickey, Dianne Durant, Gilda Karu, Fred McNamara, Jack Radzikowski, Christy Schmidt, and Dennis Stewart. In addition, to round out the skills mix, I have appointed an advisory group to the task force consisting of Ted Bell, Anneva Hackley, Frank Ippolito, and John Macoll. The team met at national headquarters on September 13 to plan its work. I have urged task force members to solicit input on agency management issues from all levels of the organization. The best insights on how things really work don't always, if ever, come from the top!

Anna Kondratas
Administrator

And The Water Came Tumbling Down

Manning a computer terminal in a government-agency cubicle is not usually the stuff of high adventure. But, as Hurricane Gilbert spent its waning fury in the Caribbean, FNS employees felt as if its tail had whipped improbably through their high-rise headquarters. On September 15, a break in a 2-inch sprinkler system pipe gave the Food and Nutrition Service a spectacular in-house flood and an unplanned housecleaning.

The Public Information Staff on the 8th floor was the "eye of the storm," as ceiling panels above Bonnie Polk's workspace opened and sheets of dirty water gushed down. While she and startled co-workers dodged the downpour, loudspeakers blared directions to evacuate the 7th, 8th and 9th floors, which is what most of us did in double-time.

(Flood Continued Page 9)

Nowhere To Go But Up

Shoes continue to drop in Washington as the Fiscal Year 1989 budget takes shape.

Administrator Anna Kondratas recently announced that FNS had successfully appealed its Fiscal Year 1989 staff year total from 1,820 to 2,000, thanks to some timely assistance from the Department's Office of Budget Planning and Analysis.

The new ceilings include 1,900 for Food Program Administration (FPA), 20 staff years for monitoring the Summer Food Service Program, and 80 staff years for the new Child Nutrition/Federal Review Initiative, which is due to receive its first funding. This totals 2,000 staff years and compares favorably to the 1,910 staff years for Fiscal Year 1988.

(Budget Continued Page 2)

Consultants Meet in Pierre

MPRO Consultants' Workshop was recently held at the Ramkota Inn, Pierre, South Dakota. For many of MPRO's child nutrition and food distribution staff, it was the second major meeting of the month, following the National Child-Care Meeting in Denver.

Each of the 10 participating states led workshops and showcases, and a special resource sharing area was provided. General session topics included legislation and regulations, presented by Stan Garnett, assistant deputy administrator of Special Nutrition Programs; the new Public Law 100-237, discussed by Susan Proden, branch chief of Food Distribution Division; civil rights aspects of our programs, outlined by Evelyn Stafford, MPRO director of Civil Rights/EEO; and a leader's summary and critique, led by Daniel Wisotzkey, Colorado's director of Child Nutrition Programs. Representatives from program breakout sessions summarized conclusions of each session.

Under discussion this year were new topics such as the adult day-care program, AccuClaim, and new commodity standards of practice—as well as new wrinkles on perennial topics, including AIMS, dietary guidelines, nutrition education and training, handicapped feeding, accounting and computerization, and the Kansas nutrition history project. Carol Axtman, South Dakota's director of Child Nutrition Programs, coordinated the agenda.

-Story by Joanne Widner
MPRO Public Affairs Staff

Linda L. Boling, Editor
Mary E. Kennedy, Assistant Editor

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FWP Offers Library Resource Aids To Improve Your SF-171

Two new reference items have been purchased for the Federal Women's Program section of the FNS Library. These are The SF-171 Express and Promote Yourself!, a series which includes three workbooks. Both items are designed to assist individuals in preparing their 171's to ensure they present their best image when applying for jobs.

The importance of the 171 cannot be overemphasized. The initial evaluation of the 171 determines whether or not an individual is to be considered for a position and given an opportunity to interview. These materials are available for use by all FNS employees.

- Story by Vicky Urcuyo
Manager, Federal Women's Program

(Budget Continued From Page 1)

Everyone is watching for Congress to complete action on the USDA money bill so that the full impact of this staff year relief can be assessed. If sufficient funds are not voted to fund the new ceiling, it will go unused.

Associate Administrator Sonia Crow said, "There are substantial differences between the USDA appropriations bills that passed the House and the Senate. Our planning for next fiscal year has progressed about as far as it can go without the FPA bottom line."

Members of the conference committee have been appointed and will meet soon to resolve differences between the two bills. The FNS staff year total, with a few exceptions, is the total hours paid to FNS employees divided by 2,080.

In addition, we now know that a 4.1 percent pay raise will be given January 1, thanks to action completed on the Treasury-Post Office Appropriations Bill.

-Story by Jerry Boling
Director, Budget Division

WIC Directors Meet Across the Country

Hampton Beach, NH

Northeast Region WIC program directors and nutritionists recently convened in Hampton Beach, New Hampshire, for their 1988 meetings.

The directors and nutritionists held separate sessions and then combined efforts on the final day. "The meeting was an excellent opportunity for the states to share management initiatives," said Lynn Wonders, regional Supplemental Food Program director. Some of the issues discussed by the directors were the national vendor futures meeting, rebate conversion formulas, targeting issues, state agency ADP initiatives, and the implications and possible changes to WIC vendor policies.

Agenda items for the nutritionists were a report on the national FNS nutritionists meeting, a discussion of nutritional risk criteria, and the CPA paraprofessional training program.

Two awards were presented by Harold McLean, NERO regional administrator. The first, a Certificate of Appreciation, was presented to the Vermont state agency in recognition of its achievements in controlling food package costs. Vermont's initiatives have resulted in average food package costs far below national and regional averages, saving approximately \$5.8 million since 1981.

The second award personally recognized John Fuhrman, acting assistant director of the Bureau of Nutrition in New York. Fuhrman's suggestion that outstanding WIC vendors be acknowledged with an award led to the development of NERO's Regional Award for Vendor Excellence (RAVE). RAVE is now presented annually in the Northeast Region.

-Story and Photo by NERO
Public Affairs Staff

Lexington, KY

State WIC directors and vendor managers from the Southeast and Midwest Regions recently met with SERO and MWRO staff in Lexington, Kentucky, for a bi-regional conference. Hot topics for discussion among directors were Medicaid, participation and enrollment reporting, and local agency use of personal computers. Vendor managers were most interested in the national vendor audit and proposed regulatory changes.

The working sessions were capped by an evening at Lexington's Red Mile Raceway, where the "WIC Cup" was presented to the winner of the "1st Annual WIC Handicap." The winning trotter was Merlin's Slicer. Those participating in the presentation of the WIC Cup included MWRO Regional Administrator Monroe Woods (far right), SERO Regional Administrator Virgil Conrad (second from right), and SERO WIC Director Nena Bratianu (holding WIC Cup).



Harold McLean, NERO regional administrator, presents a Certificate of Appreciation to Donna Bister, program director of the Vermont WIC program. The certificate is in recognition of the state agency's achievements in controlling food package costs.

(WIC Continued Next Page)



-Story and Photo by SERO
Public Affairs Staff

Denver, CO

Mountain Plains Regional Administrator David Alspach (center) welcomed FNS's national and regional WIC program directors to a meeting in Denver on July 26-28. The three-day meeting included a session on Focus on Management with key leaders of the state WIC program directors association.

-Story and Photo by MPRO
Public Affairs Staff



Operation Payback a Big Success

SERO has a new initiative to combat fraud, waste, and abuse in the Food Stamp Program.

Known as "Operation Payback," it's a federal/state effort by SERO and the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) to collect delinquent claims.

The crackdown, which began the first week of May, involved a mass mailing of 10,000 demand letters addressed to Floridians who collectively owe the government \$2 million. After only four weeks, it became obvious that "Operation Payback" was having an impact. Florida had collected \$25,000 at a central mailbox, and there was a significant increase in payments made to the district offices of Florida's Office of Fraud Recoupment and Recovery.

"We won't know the final results until the end of August," said Charlie Simmons, a SERO food program specialist. "But Florida officials have said our presence in the project has helped them collect delinquent claims they were not getting through their own demand letters."

This joint demand letter, signed by Regional Administrator Virgil Conrad and Florida HRS Secretary Gregory L. Coler, went to Floridians who owed the program money but were no longer receiving food stamps. Each former recipient had gainful employment that made it possible to repay his or her food stamp delinquent claim.

SERO and Florida were able to target these persons through a computer match of 19,000 potential payees of delinquent claims using state and federal employment records of 26,000 food stamp recipients who had been overpaid. SERO's part was to identify ability-to-repay accounts from the list of potential payees. By searching computer printouts, the regional office came up with 10,000 names. Then it did the mass mailing.

"It was a group idea," Simmons said. "We were having an annual retreat for the management evaluation unit to plan work priorities and noticed a lot of improvement was needed in collecting recipient delinquent claims. So we approached Florida about a joint project, and the state thought it was a good idea."

Once the program is over, Florida plans to take civil action against those who have not begun to repay the claims. The state also has established, as a result of the program, a centralized office with a box to receive payment for all food stamp delinquent claims.

Because of the success of "Operation Payback," SERO is planning to expand this initiative to other states. Alabama has been approached with the idea, and South Carolina and North Carolina are on the list.

"We want people with delinquent claims to take notice that the federal government has taken an interest in the money they owe," Simmons said.



From left to right: Charlie Simmons, James Brame, David Ellenburg, and Paul Boaz (Food Stamp Program) study computer printouts as part of SERO's "Operation Payback" initiative.

-Story and Photo by Steve Watson
SERO Public Affairs Staff

Food Programs Participation Update

Following are preliminary estimates of participation in the Federal-State food assistance programs for the month of June with comparisons to the previous month and to the same month of last year.

	June 1987	May 1988	June 1988 2/
<u>Food Stamp Program: 1/</u>			
People participating (mil.)	19.0	18.8	18.6
Value of bonus coupons (\$ mil.)	861.9	928.8	915.9
Average bonus per person	\$ 45.38	\$ 49.44	\$ 49.27
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	957.2	1,030.3	1,017.5
<u>National School Lunch Program:</u>			
Number of schools participating (thous.)	90.2	90.6	90.6
Children participating (mil.)	9.4	23.5	9.9
Children reached with free or reduced price lunches (mil.)	5.1	11.1	5.3
Percentage of lunches served free	49.7	40.5	48.5
Percentage of lunches served at reduced price	6.4	6.5	6.2
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	102.0	386.5	106.2
<u>School Breakfast Program:</u>			
Number of schools participating (thous.)	37.2	38.7	38.7
Children participating (mil.)	1.5	3.7	1.7
Percentage of breakfasts served free or at reduced price	91.6	87.0	90.2
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	16.0	54.8	16.0
<u>Child Care Food Program:</u>			
Number of meals served in centers (mil.)	30.2	39.7	34.2
Number of meals served in homes (mil.)	27.5	31.0	31.8
Percentage of all meals served free	76.3	78.0	77.8
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	41.8	53.5	49.7
<u>Special Supplemental Food Program (WIC):</u>			
People participating (mil.)	3.5	3.7	3.7
Food cost (\$ mil.)	113.8	123.5	123.9
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	141.3	153.0	153.0
<u>Commodity Supplemental Food Program: 3/</u>			
People participating (thous.)	200.5	209.0	207.5
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	3.6	3.5	3.4
<u>Food Distribution to Indians and Needy Families:</u>			
Number of projects in operation	106	107	107
People participating (thous.)	145.0	134.0	136.1
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	4.3	4.2	4.2
<u>Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program:</u>			
Total USDA cost (\$ mil.)	66.5	9.2	15.5

1/ Puerto Rico has been excluded from all months.

2/ Data collected as of August 25, 1988.

3/ Includes data for all elderly participants.

MAROans Learn About Audio-Visuals

Marian Wig, public affairs specialist, is MARO's resident expert in audio-visuals. So it was fitting that she recently taught two sessions on "preparing for and designing all types of visuals" for MARO employees.



Wig's presentation demonstrated the skills, techniques, and media that she was teaching. The 60 or so who attended learned about selecting appropriate media; designing useful visuals; using overhead projectors, 35 mm. slides, computers, and other media; and caring for equipment.

The highlight of the training sessions was a slide presentation that Wig produced specifically for the occasion. The slide show featured Barbara Hunt, MARO public affairs office secretary, who portrayed a new public affairs director. Hunt showed the steps she would follow to prepare her first slide show--from planning, photography, and scripting to finished product.

-Story and photo by Linda Feldman
MARO Public Affairs Staff

"Health Works" For Midwest Employees

MWRO is promoting a "Health Works--Feel Great in 88" program for all Midwest FNS employees. "The region is committed to increasing employee awareness of the importance of staying well," says Monroe Woods, regional administrator.

A representative from Blue Cross and Blue Shield presented the program, "Your Healthy Best," and each participating MWRO employee completed a personal fitness questionnaire. Blue Cross and Blue Shield returned questionnaire results as individual computerized assessments of each employee's fitness. Strengths and areas needing improvement were highlighted.

Blue Cross also provided a summary report noting overall employee health strengths and weaknesses, and helped the regional office schedule intervention courses based on areas where improved health habits are needed. Self-esteem was an area in which a large number of MWRO employees scored low. A session on maintaining a good self-image was held.

Each participating employee also received three free books: Personal Fitness Diary, Symptoms and Treatment, and A Guide to More Healthful Living.

The region also sponsored a Nutrition and Fitness Week. The highlight of the week was a presentation by Ann Chadwick, director of USDA's Office of the Consumer Advisor, on "Nutrition Misinformation--Common Misconceptions About Food and Diet." FNS nutritionists presented sessions on weight loss and diet analysis.

In addition, 20 MWRO employees are now attending low-impact aerobics classes during their lunchtime.

"Health Works" has given MWRO employees an opportunity to join together to learn more about staying well and improving health.

-Story by Mary Jane Getlinger
MWRO Public Affairs Staff

States Exchange Corrective Action Tips

Representatives from Utah's Assistance Payments Administration and Office of Community Operations (OCO) met at the Mountain Plains Regional Office with their counterparts from Colorado's Social Services Department and FNS staff to share ideas about food stamp error reduction and corrective action planning. Travel for the meeting was paid for by state exchange funds.

Utah's presentation included OCO's corrective action handbook, a 1987 report of the Target Absent Parent Problems (TAPP) committee, and an overview of the peer review process. TAPP was one of Utah's first efforts at using a workshop structure to write corrective action plans. The peer review is a special review effort of Aid to Families with Dependent Children, General Assistance, Medicaid, and food stamp cases. It is performed by a team of reviewers to measure productivity, evaluate accuracy of eligibility work, gather statistics for workload standards, develop district error-prone profiles, and share efficient procedures.

Utah and Colorado have different approaches to quality control (QC) and corrective action. Utah has a state-run, state-administered program, while Colorado's is state-administered but largely county-run except for a group of mountain counties and the Denver and Colorado Springs urban areas, which are state-run.

Both states and their FNS colleagues agree on the importance of a good review process in reducing error rates. As Dan Gorman of the Colorado staff put it, "If you could train people to do good administrative reviews, you might not have an error rate."

Utah emphasizes the teamwork concept, bringing quality control and policy staff together in a nonadversarial committee setting to review questionable QC error cases. Its error resolution committee meets weekly, and

both QC and policy staff support the committee's decisions.

Each Utah district office has a corrective action coordinator. They meet semiannually at corrective action conferences. Each year at the fall meeting, district staff cooperate in writing the state's corrective action plan. Since they create it, they "own" it in terms of willing compliance. Low-error districts receive special awards. The QC team is no longer looked upon as "the bad guys."

Each district also writes its own corrective action plan, spelling out specific ways corrective action will be implemented. All areas of the state plan in which the district has a history of problems must be addressed in the district plan, and other areas must be monitored for potential trouble. It's what OCO's Maryann Stevens calls ongoing maintenance.

Utah's corrective action process handbook is built along problem-solving lines and tells the districts how to build corrective action by analyzing problems and causes. It is used in statewide and district workshops.

Utah and Colorado staff came away from the meeting with new ideas to adapt. In both states, the effort to maintain program integrity and prevent errors is an ongoing, integral part of the Food Stamp Program. As a result, error rates are coming down.

-Story by Joanne Widner
MPRO Public Affairs Staff



At the same time, a second front had opened, with water pouring in torrents into Larry Rana's nearby office. Grasping the nature of the emergency, the property management branch urged staff on every floor to move equipment and materials off the floor and, where possible, out of the way of the water that quickly collapsed ceiling tiles and flowed down walls and stairwells to the floors below.

"People were quick to respond," says Linda Young, head of the property section of Administrative Services. "I couldn't believe the amount of furniture and computers that were moved to safety. This prompt action reduced considerably the damage sustained. But, of course, a lot of materials stored in boxes on the floor were soaked or destroyed.

"Our contractor is reviewing all the equipment suspected of water damage."

Someone slammed shut Larry's door like a dike against the oncoming tide. When he opened it, a wave of water swept out, crested by floating notebooks. However, Larry, Dave Warner, Paul Braun and other quick-thinking rescue workers on every floor diverted equipment and documents from the water's path.

Several computers had shorted out, and the combination of ankle deep water and electrical equipment made slogging around risky business, so employees filed downstairs to wait for the fire department.

FNS also contacted the building management, whose employees were enjoying a carefree annual picnic. Nevertheless, the work of restoration was underway within an hour and a half, after the water was cut off.

Damage was primarily in the south half of the building, where ceiling tiles collapsed on the 7th and 6th floors and water seeped down the walls. Employees

waiting outside in the entrance plaza for an all-clear signal watched the water cascade behind seven floors of window panes.

Administrator Anna Kondratas dismissed employees that afternoon and, later, employees were directed not to report to work on Friday.

Four companies worked to extract water from the carpet and fan it dry. One hundred cases of ceiling tiles were installed to replace those fallen or damaged. The sprinkler system, all electrical systems, and the fire alarm were tested.

"On Friday," says Linda, "the mess was unbelievable. It was unreal. But property management personnel were on hand all weekend to supervise cleanup operations. By Monday, 90 percent of the affected areas were available for use."

And the other 10 percent? Ask Bonnie and Larry.

-Story by Wini Scheffler
Public Information Staff



Job Opportunities

FNS is seeking to fill the vacant positions listed below. To be considered for one of them, submit an up-to-date SF-171, Application for Federal Employment, and current performance appraisal to the appropriate personnel office. If you are interested in a headquarters position, apply to the Operations Branch, Personnel Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Alexandria, Virginia

22302. Apply directly to headquarters office for all GM-14 and 15 positions. For regional positions, apply directly to the regional office. For details on the requirements for any of the positions listed below, consult the official vacancy announcement. These are posted on designated bulletin boards or copies can be obtained from the appropriate regional or headquarters personnel office.

Friday Letter Vacancy Listing By Vacancy Number

JOB TITLE	AREA OF CONSID.	SERIES	GRADE	CLOSING DATE	VACANCY NUMBER	OFFICE LOCATION
o Clerk Stay in Schooler	(A)	GW-303	1/2	Open	88-SIS	FNS
o Clerk Typist	(A)	GS-322	2/3/4	Open until Filled	NONE	FNS
o Space Utiliz Spec	(G)	GS-301	9/11/12	9/27/88	88-77	ASD
o Computer Prog Anal	(FNW)	GS-334	13	9/27/88	88-91	IRMD
o Food Prog Spec	(WMA)	GS-120	9/11	9/27/88	88-99A	SFPD
o Computer Prog Anal	(A)	GS-334	12/13	10/2/88	88-100	IRMD
o Computer Prog Anal	(A)	GS-334	11/12	9/27/88	88-101	IRMD
o Support Serv Supvr	(G)	GS-342	8	9/27/88	88-102	ASD
o Home Economist	(HNIS)	GS-493	11	9/22/88	88-103	HNIS
o Emp Relations Spec	(G)	GS-230	12	10/11/88	88-104	PED
o Communications Spec	(A)	GS-393	9/11	10/11/88	88-105	ASD
o Secretary (Typg)	(A)	GS-318	3/4/5	10/11/88	88-106	PAD
o Secretary (Typg)	(A)	GS-318	5	10/11/88	88-107	PAD
o Secretary (Typg)	(A)	GS-318	6	10/11/88	88-108	PDD

Office Location

FNS - Food and Nutrition Service
 IRMD - Information Resources Management Division
 ASD - Administrative Services Division
 PAD - Program Accountability Division
 PED - Personnel Division
 SFPD - Supplemental Food Program Division
 HNIS - Human Nutrition & Information Service (Permanent PT)

Area of Consideration

(A) - All Sources
 (G) - Governmentwide
 (FNW) - Food and Nutrition Service Nationwide
 (HNIS) - Human Nutrition & Information Service
 (A) - All Sources (Local Commuting Area)
 (WMA) - Washington Metro. Area